**School of Biological Sciences**

**Making the most of your Laboratory Demonstrators**

Good laboratory demonstrators can help your practical run smoothly and successfully and evidence shows that they can have positive impact on the unit evaluation! Conversely, demonstrators that perform below par can produce dissatisfied students, and that in turn will impact on the feedback that is provided about your practical.

***So, how can you make the most of your demonstrators?***

All laboratory demonstrators must have completed a compulsory GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistant) training course before applying to become a lab demonstrator. This course provides generic training in basic teaching and learning theory and practice, but it is up to the individual staff who run practicals to provide more specific training on the particular experiment in question.

But practical skills are not enough! Staff must also reinforce the messages from the GTA course about expecting their demonstrators to behave in a professional and proactive manner.

***Here are some useful hints and tips on what to discuss with your demonstrators at their training session:***

* When they contact you to confirm their appointment, email them to welcome them to the practical team and arrange a time, date and place for the initial training session. This may be in the hour immediately preceding the first practical, for example.
* Email them a copy of the experiment/s; you might also want to fill in the answers to any questions in the manual, or provide example data and calculations if appropriate; you don’t want them telling the students the wrong things.

***At the training session, discuss***

How you expect them to behave:

* What time they should arrive
* Make sure they are prepared (read the manual and think about what questions the students might ask, or how to explain certain aspects).
* Will they be in charge of a particular group of students? If so, they should let them know their name (wear a badge perhaps).
* They should help other groups if theirs finishes ahead of schedule?
* Be a good role model (lab coat fastened, hair tied back if long, safety glasses if required etc.)
* Be interested and engaged with the students; circulate around the group/room.
* To inform you if they are absent and arrange a *trained* replacement if at all possible.
* Communicate clearly to the students and check that they understand. Some demonstrators are quite shy and prefer to speak to pairs of students; others are happy to address a whole group; your demonstrator should let their group know their strategy.
* Provide help but not answers!
* Remind students about registration (first year students swipe attendance on a card reader).
* Supervise students when clearing away at the end of the practical
* Sign off books and give formative feedback as directed and if required; this helps to ‘round off’ the practical.

The practical aspects of the experiment:

* how to use the equipment (there are many different types of spectrophotometer, microscopes etc. in the teaching labs),
* be aware of health and safety issues,
* where to find additional items such as paper, pipettes etc.,
* where to find the lab technicians
* where to find emergency phone numbers in case of accidents

The theoretical principles behind the experiment and the context:

* What have students done before?
* Is this the first time they have done this?
* How best to explain the calculations and concepts
* How to present results and analyse data
* How to conclude the experiment at the end of the afternoon

If the demonstrators understand what the experiment is about and how it fits in to the curriculum, then they can help the students more effectively.

**\*Please be aware that as demonstrators receive a contract of employment from HR for the sessions they have been assigned they must be utilised for these sessions otherwise the Faculty have to find them alternative work for the contracted hours.\***